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SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF TRANS-BORDER CHILD TRAFFICKING IN GUINEA

11. (U) SUMMARY. Following a series of investigative cables exploring child trafficking in Guinea (reftels), it is clear that in order to successfully address this issue, the USG and its partners must focus on three critical aspects of the problem: supply, demand, and the traffickers themselves. Ending child trafficking in Guinea requires: 1) recognizing and addressing the multiple cultural reasons Guinean children are especially vulnerable to child trafficking; 2) understanding and combating the demand in other countries for Guinean children; and 3) educating and training local officials, police, and border agents about child trafficking so as to apprehend, investigate and prosecute potential traffickers. END SUMMARY.

2008 TIP REPORT FOR GUINEA

12. (SBU) Recent regional reporting pieces on child trafficking (reftels) have provided the Embassy with a broader understanding of trafficking in persons (TIP) in Guinea. While still a "source, transit, and destination" country for child trafficking, research suggests that Guinea is primarily a source country, and rarely is a destination point. Guinean children are frequently trafficked into Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. Girls and women from Mali are being trafficked into Guinea for domestic servitude, but Embassy research revealed no evidence to suggest that children are being trafficked into Guinea from other neighboring countries. Recent reporting also confirms that there is a high incidence of internal child trafficking within Guinea of children from villages being trafficked to larger cities, specifically Kankan, N'Zerekore and Conakry.

13. (SBU) The regional reporting pieces corroborate previous Embassy information that the Government of Guinea demonstrates minimal law enforcement efforts, frequently dismissing cases and releasing alleged traffickers. Of the multiple incidents investigated during the reporting trips, authorities, police and justice officials throughout the country could not point to a single child trafficking conviction. Frequently, alleged traffickers appear to simply vanish, or escape police custody after being apprehended.

SOURCE: GUINEAN CHILDREN VULNERABLE TO TRAFFICKING

14. (SBU) Reporting suggests there are many cultural reasons Guinean children are especially vulnerable to trafficking. Traditional norms such as the concept of guardianship and Koranic study abroad provide children with new opportunities and a brighter future. Unfortunately, it is apparent that child traffickers have discovered

these practices as loopholes to traffic children for exploitation. While not every instance of these practices leads to child trafficking, the prevalence, as well as the risk of exploitation, may be increasing, leading some authorities to ban the practices altogether.

15. (SBU) Guardianship, also referred to as "confisage," is a tradition whereby a parent gives their child to a relative or member of village with the expectation that the child will get an education or learn a trade. Success stories of children who successfully get secondary education or a college degree fuel this practice. Unfortunately, reporting suggests that many local authorities, NGOs, and police in Guinea have serious concerns that child traffickers take advantage of these practices, using them as a cover to transport children for exploitation. Lack of reliable communications in Guinea makes it very difficult for parents to monitor whether their child is actually receiving an education, or being exploited. Poverty is a key factor supporting the continuation of these traditional practices. As parents become unable to provide food, education and health care for their child, they become increasingly likely to give the child to someone who they genuinely believe will provide for them.

16. (SBU) Another related issue to guardianship is defining the term "relative." In Guinea, a relative is defined much more broadly than in most western cultures. For example, Guineans often refer to members of their ethnic group as relatives even if the blood connection is very distant. The Guinean concept of relative is one of community and trust, which allows for the practice of guardianship to occur. Unfortunately, reporting suggests that traffickers exploit this trust and respect. For example, in the village of Kiniebakoura near Siguiri, a mother described how she had

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sent her ten year old daughter with an aunt to Abidjan. She explained that the relative could not have her own children, so the mother "could not say no." The mother later learned that the relative had given the girl to another woman to work as domestic help. When asked about the family relation, the woman said the "aunt" was actually a member of her husband's birth village in Abidjan, and could not provide any evidence of blood relation.

17. (SBU) NGOs in Labe, Siguiri and Kankan all expressed frustration over the term "relative." They noted that part of the battle against trafficking and exploitation involves changing parents' mentality in order to stop them from sending their children with people who could potentially exploit them. NGO work in villages focuses on explaining the risks of sending children with distant relatives, and stressing educating children within their own village. One village on the Malian border could not control the reportedly high number of parents sending children with relatives abroad, so the village chief instead instituted a minimum age for leaving the community for education or work abroad.

18. (SBU) Another traditional practice exploited by child traffickers in Guinea is sending children with marabouts abroad to study the Koran. Similar to guardianship, in the past many children successfully received Koranic education in Senegal and Mali and returned to share their stories. However, reporting suggests serious concerns from Guinean authorities, police, and NGOs that children sent to these programs are being exploited in Senegal and Mali. As marabouts often have parental consent to transport children, it is difficult for police and border agents to identify and apprehend potential child traffickers. NGOs working to combat child trafficking in Guinea focus their attention on villages at the grassroots level, educating parents about the dangers of sending their child with marabouts.

19. (SBU) Reporting suggests a serious need for more targeted sensitization campaigns aimed at villages in order to warn parents and children of the risks involved in these traditional practices. While Save the Children has been successful in their education programs in Siguiri and Mandiana, more community outreach is needed, especially in the Middle Guinea Prefectures of Koundara and Labe. In these prefectures, there appears to be a high incidence of children crossing Guinea's northern border with guardians and

marabouts. There is also an apparent lack of knowledge from authorities, police, and border agents in these areas as to the potential risks of these traditional practices.

DEMAND FOR CHILDREN

¶10. (SBU) Stopping child trafficking in Guinea means addressing the traditional practices that contribute to both supply and demand, in addition to arresting and punishing the actual traffickers. While Guinea is often mentioned as a source country, its children are supplying an external demand. Since trafficking is a transnational issue, it is difficult to ascertain exactly why Guinean children are being trafficked throughout the region. Recent reporting indicates that Guinea is rarely a destination country for trafficking victims, at least with respect to trafficking over its main borders. There were numerous reports of Guinean children being trafficked out to neighboring countries but only one border (Mali) reportedly sees children being trafficked into Guinea. The apparent supply flow suggests that traffickers, and possibly even trafficking networks, are feeding a demand for children in Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. However, sources throughout the country could only provide theories as to where and why children are being trafficked. NGO contacts in N'Zerekore and Forecariah both mentioned concern about the demand for Guinean children, and plan future research projects to gather information in Liberia and Sierra Leone, respectively.

¶11. (SBU) Embassy reports also indicate that children are frequently being transported, and in large numbers, by marabouts for Koranic education in Senegal and Mali. While some say this is a safe long-standing religious practice, others are confident that children are being forced into child labor, or begging on the streets. The fact that groups of 5, 10, or 25 children frequently leave Guinea with self-proclaimed marabouts is suspicious. It is likely that a number of Guinean children are attending legitimate Koranic schools in Senegal and Mali. However, there may also be a significant number of children transported under the auspices of attending one of these Koranic schools, who then fall victim to exploitation upon arrival.

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Guinean officials have no way of determining whether marabouts are legitimate teachers or child traffickers.

¶12. (SBU) Reporting indicates that information sharing across the border is needed in order to address demand issues. Research is necessary to determine exactly which towns and economic sectors of Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau have a high prevalence of Guinean children, and the type of activities children are involved in. If Guinean authorities, police, border agents, and NGOs understood the demand for children in other countries they could more effectively combat the problem, thereby decreasing the vulnerability of Guinea as a source country.

APPREHENDING, INVESTIGATING, AND PROSECUTING TRAFFICKERS

¶13. (SBU) Stopping traffickers requires vigilance and coordination amongst local authorities, police, and border agents. Of the multiple alleged trafficking incidents investigated during the reporting trips, officials throughout the country could not point to a single child trafficking conviction. Alleged traffickers often disappear or escape police custody after being apprehended. Reporting suggests that officials in all four of Guinea's natural regions have heard of child trafficking, and most say they are trying to combat it. Recent incidents in Forecariah have been broadcasted over the radio and many authorities and police have been part of NGO education campaigns. While the claim of "vigilance" is widespread, it is not clear whether officials know exactly what child trafficking is or how to be vigilant.

¶14. (SBU) However, reporting suggests that authorities are confused about the difference between child trafficking and child abduction.

Authorities in Sangaredi released alleged traffickers because the marabouts had parental consent so "it was not a trafficking case." When authorities and police in Siguiro and Mandiana were asked about child trafficking cases, recent child abductions cases were offered while incidents of marabouts traveling with 5, 10, or 15 children were overlooked. Border agents in Koundara admitted to allowing marabouts to cross with multiple children, even if "the marabouts appear to be mistreating the children since some of them are scared, hungry and tired when they reach the checkpoint."

¶15. (SBU) There appears to be two main reasons for the confusion about child trafficking. First, reporting indicates that police and border agents regard parental consent as a "free-pass" over the border without further investigation, even though they may be suspicious of maltreatment and exploitation. As guardians and marabouts usually have parental consent, police and border agents are effectively blocked from apprehending potential child traffickers. Police and border agents report only investigating incidents where parental consent is not adequately demonstrated. At one of Guinea's borders, an agent said he was powerless to act when someone has parental consent, saying that he is suspicious of the intent of the guardian, "but there is nothing we can do." Secondly, the traditional practices themselves complicate apprehensions and prosecutions. As border agents and police are not aware of the potential risks of these practices, they cannot be vigilant of suspected child traffickers.

¶16. (SBU) Recent reporting suggests that because these issues complicate investigations, police focus only on prosecuting cases of children who are abducted and then trafficked. While child abduction is a relatively straightforward and a convictable offense, child trafficking that includes guardianship, marabouts and parental consent is convoluted and difficult to convict. It is apparent from Embassy reporting that police do not know how to investigate and prosecute cases when the child has not been abducted. Guinean police and border agents require education regarding the definition and types of child trafficking, training in how to recognize potential traffickers, and assistance in investigating complicated child trafficking cases.

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